

Postscripts

by Jack Post

When George Partridge rode back into Duxbury toward evening on that 19th of April, the meeting house bell had finally stopped tolling. All of the farmers had come in from the fields, most of them gun in hand. Early in the day the express rider had galloped in, dismounting just long enough to throw the saddle off his panting horse while he repeated the fearful tidings of the massacre of the patriots at Lexington green, and the continuing march of the British soldiers toward Concord. Mounting a fresh horse, he had hurried on to alert Kingston and Plymouth. By now the men in those towns, too, would be assembling.

Now in the gathering darkness George Partridge found himself the center of a crowd all shouting questions. As the Duxbury representative to the Provincial Congress, he had only that morning set off for the next session, due to meet day after tomorrow in Concord. He had turned back from Roxbury to warn his townsmen of the fighting, and to join in the plan of action. He could ride to Concord later, when the British had retired to Boston. Actually he did not know much more of the battle, and it was not until well into the next day that another rider brought news of the bloody British retreat back to Boston.

But George Partridge was also Captain in the Duxbury militia company, which last year had elected to become a part of the Plymouth County Regiment. Now, in a meeting at Colonel Briggs Alden's house in Duxbury, Colonel Cotton, commander of the regiment, proposed to move the minutemen against the detachment of British regulars quartered in Marshfield for the protection of the loyalists there.

Early on the morning of the 21st, the march began from Plymouth, picking up the Kingston company under Captain Peleg Wadsworth at the Jones River, then the Duxbury company near the Meeting House. By the time the patriots had straggled by Green's Harbor, their numbers had increased to almost 500, as men all along the route left their spring plowing or tied up their fishing boats to join their companions in arms. Two more companies, one from Rochester and another from Plympton, would before the day's end give them overwhelming force against the 100 redcoats and their loyalist allies.

On the rise overlooking John Thomas' farm where the British were bivouacked, the patriot leaders halted for a lengthy conference. In the distance they could make out the scarlet coats and catch the glitter of the sun on the rifle barrels. Should they attack now, or wait for the rest of the militia men to gather? No one seemed able to decide, for this was a democratic army with elected officers; no one, except Captain Peleg Wadsworth, who impetuously moved the Kingston company forward toward the enemy, until he realized that the rest of the militia would not follow, so halted himself just out of range of the redcoat regulars.

Captain Balfour of the Queen's Guards, watching all this, was no fool. He had made a foray or 2 towards Duxbury, and some weeks ago he had considered an expedition against Plymouth to destroy powder supplies accumulated there, but had desisted when advised by Edward Winslow, loyalist of Marshfield and by John Watson of Plymouth that the patriots would "fight like devils."

Today his informers had come back with the news that the countryside was rising in force. Nothing was to be served by a pitched battle against unequal odds here; so quickly and quietly as the afternoon began to wane he moved his men back toward the Cut River. There the soldiers in their heavy battle equipment climbed awkwardly aboard longboats, rowed in to rescue them from 2 sloops of war riding at anchor off Brant Rock. They were forced to abandon tents and other equipment too heavy to remove, but the withdrawal was disciplined and speedy.

As the last squad embarked in the darkness, the soldiers seized 2 American sentries. One they turned loose when there was no room in the boat, but the other broke away and fired off his rifle; but the alarm came too late. The entire British force has escaped scot free.